



USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program

5-Year Strategic Direction



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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PHOTO CREDITS

Page 1: Trail in New Hampshire, courtesy of Kathryn Conant, USDA Forest Service. View from Spruce Mountain in Colorado, courtesy of Claire Harper, USDA Forest Service.

Page 2: Waterfall at Coon Gulf in Alabama, courtesy of Liz Crane, USDA Forest Service. Stream at Gnaw Bone Camp in Indiana, courtesy of Kathryn Conant, USDA Forest Service.

Page 4: Nicasius Lake in Maine, courtesy of Neal Bungard, USDA Forest Service.

Page 5: Horses grazing on Vallecitos Mountain Refuge in New Mexico, courtesy of Bob Sivinski, New Mexico Forestry Division.

Page 6: Stream at Peaceful Valley in Utah, courtesy of Ann Price, Utah Division of Forestry.

Page 7: View from the Carbon River property in Washington, courtesy of Kathryn Conant, USDA Forest Service. Wetland on the Edisto property in South Carolina, courtesy of Claire Harper, USDA Forest Service.

Page 8: Stream at the Trout Pond property in New Hampshire, courtesy of Kathryn Conant, USDA Forest Service.

Page 9: Forests in New York, courtesy of Kathryn Conant, USDA Forest Service.

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Back cover: View from Homestead, CO, courtesy of Susan Gray, USDA Forest Service.



Executive Summary

This 5-year strategy provides direction for the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) to improve accountability and performance. It will guide the FLP in building on its success and constantly improving over the next 5 years. It is intended to provide a national perspective for FLP and assist States in contributing to national and regional conservation needs. This strategy does not supplant State Assessments of Need or the FLP Guidelines.

A U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service and State team of representatives from every region of the country developed this strategy. The team examined forest status and trends data for the Nation, as well as projections of forest change and conversion for the next 25 years.

The document outlines four strategic priorities, as well as goals, actions, and performance measurements to provide a benchmark for FLP progress. The priorities are:

- 1.** Promote the Strategic Conservation of Private Forests.
- 2.** Conserve Private Forests that Provide Environmental and Economic Benefits to People and Communities.
- 3.** Slow the Conversion and Parcelization of Environmentally and Economically Important Private Forests.
- 4.** Continually Improve FLP Business Practices.



Purpose

The FLP focuses on “working forests”—those that provide an array of environmental services and products. This includes clean air, clean water, carbon sequestration, and a variety of fish and wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities, as well as timber and other forest products. The FLP works to maintain healthy, productive forest lands that are sustainable over the long term. The program requires forest planning in order to define management objectives through professional natural resource management. Due to the nature of natural resource management, many uses will be compatible; however, this program does not require every use from every acre.

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Background

Forests provide many benefits to people. Forests clean our environment; supply wood, water, and food; provide habitat for fish and wildlife; and offer areas to play and relax through outdoor recreation and contemplative experiences. They provide economic benefits domestically and are an important export. We seek forests as an amenity to our homes and as an enhancement to the quality of life in the communities in which we live.

Although the amount of private forest land is increasing in some places in the country, the total area of private forest land has gradually declined since the mid-20th century. Increasing population and expanding urban centers are adding demands on our forests. Projections indicate that some 44.2 million acres (over 11 percent) of private forest are likely to see dramatic increases in housing density in the next three decades. While American forests are still expansive and diverse, the pressures are mounting.

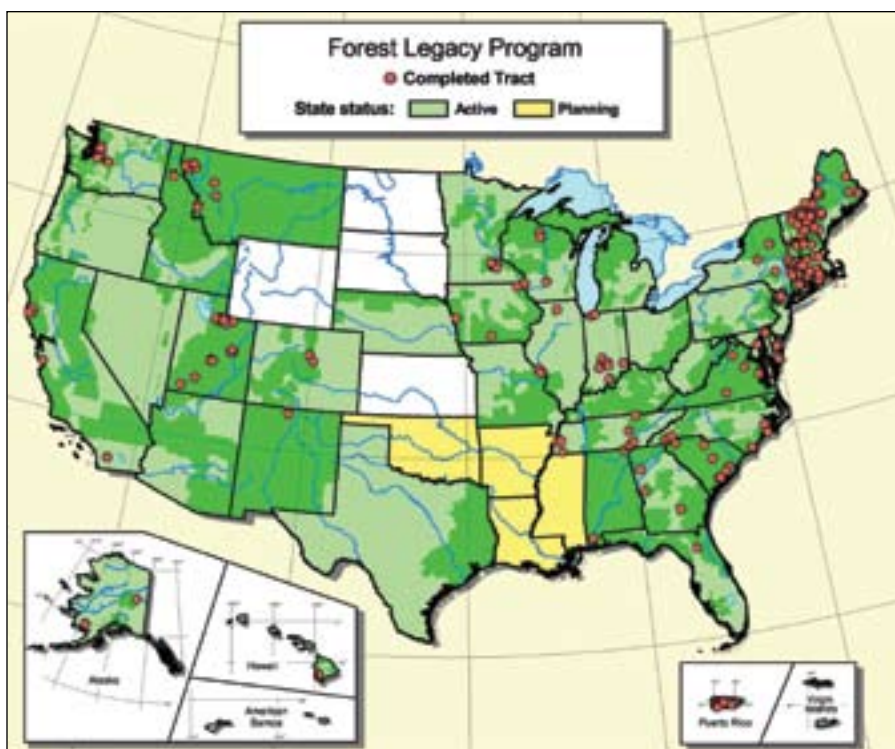
Recent studies and analyses indicate trends that change is ahead and that private forests are vulnerable. Research shows that:

- More than 57 percent of the total forest land in the United States is privately owned.
- Between 1982 and 1997, over 10.3 million acres were converted from forest to development (appendix A).
- Vast areas of the Northeast, Southeast, Upper Great Lakes region and Pacific Northwest have high amounts of private forests vulnerable to development pressure (appendix B).
- Forest Service analysis indicates that by 2030 increased housing density could result in significant conversion of forests in New England, the mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and Pacific Northwest (appendix C).

“The Forest Legacy Program has been a model program in terms of convening partnerships to accomplish forest conservation goals. It is an incentive-based and strictly voluntary program that conserves working forests, the opportunities they provide to communities, and environmental benefits for all Americans.”

— Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth

- Development results in the loss of forests, smaller areas of intact forest, smaller parcel sizes, and isolation of forest fragments. These changes alter the ability of private forests to provide many ecological, economic, and social benefits.



The FLP has protected over 1,047,000 acres as of September 30, 2005.

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) was established in 1990 to ascertain and protect environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by conversion to nonforest uses and to promote the long-term sustainability of forest lands. The FLP authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, through the USDA Forest Service, to work in cooperation with States, commonwealths, territories, and tribes to acquire lands and interests in lands in perpetuity to meet this end.

The FLP involves many partners, including participating States, local governments, and nonprofit organizations, such as land trusts. Active States develop and operate under the umbrella of an Assessment of Need (AON)—an implementation plan that

defines the threat to that State's forests, identifies important private forest lands, articulates the public benefits provided by these forests, and identifies areas of focus for the program. The State delineates specific Forest Legacy Areas (FLAs) in the AON. Conservation projects must be located in an FLA to qualify for FLP funding.

The FLP has enjoyed success since its inception in 1990. As of 2005, the program has protected over 1 million acres of working forests across 32 States. The program has experienced solid growth in terms of budget and has expanded to a total of 45 participating States across the Nation, with an additional 4 in the AON planning process. The program has been successful due to the clear national need for a conservation program that focuses on forests and to the hard work of State, local, and nonprofit partners to produce effective results.

Mission: To protect environmentally important private forests across the Nation and promote the sustainable forest management of those working lands to provide benefits to people and society.

Vision: Abundant working forests serving the citizens of the United States.

Guiding Principles:

- The FLP strives for permanent protection of important forest lands, utilizing high ethical standards and sound business principles. We commit to constant improvement.
- State AONs are the foundation for the FLP. They are prepared at the State level with local input. They provide strength to the program because they are developed from within each State with the best knowledge of local conditions and conservation needs.
- Partnerships are a key to the success of program implementation. States and the Forest Service, working with other governmental and land conservation partners, accomplish

the goals of the FLP. Forest land is conserved and protected using conservation easements and fee simple purchase from willing landowners through partnerships, including third party transactions. Together, we produce results.

- Professional forest management and traditional uses, within the conservation purposes, are encouraged and supported. Traditional forest uses, including timber harvesting, are encouraged and supported on lands protected by the FLP through multiple resource management plans and best management practices. Priority is given to lands which can be effectively protected and managed and that have important scenic or recreational values; riparian areas; fish and wildlife values, including threatened and endangered species; or other ecological values.



1. Promote the Strategic Conservation of Private Forests

GOAL 1—FLP projects contribute to regional, landscape, or watershed-based efforts to protect important private forests, regardless of tract size.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Give funding preference to FLP projects that contribute to focused land conservation strategies.
- ▲ Foster collaborations among States, communities, and conservation organizations to accomplish strategic conservation.
- ▲ Include information on strategic conservation in regional and national FLP meetings, training events, publications, and field programs.
- ▲ Support research on strategic conservation.
- ▲ Develop training opportunities and planning tools on strategic conservation.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of FLP projects that are part of a comprehensive conservation initiative (e.g., initiatives that are guided by watershed or regional plans).

GOAL 2—FLP projects address clear conservation priority issues as expressed in AON plans.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Give funding preference to projects that clearly address issues articulated in AON plans.
- ▲ Require project proposals in the Forest Legacy Information System to include descriptions of how the project addresses relevant State conservation issues identified in AON plans.
- ▲ Review AONs for relevancy of current or emerging conservation issues every 5 years from date of AON approval.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of AONs that have been reviewed and/or updated in the past 5 years to incorporate emerging conservation priority issues.

GOAL 3—The majority of FLP projects are strategically linked to other protected lands to create a cumulative conservation effect.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Give funding preference to projects that link, block, or buffer protected lands.
- ▲ Allow establishment of new project areas that will, in the future, link to other protected lands.
- ▲ Develop maps of protected lands in every participating FLP State by 2008.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of FLP projects that are adjacent to or link protected lands.

2. Conserve Private Forests That Provide Environmental and Economic Benefits to People and Communities

GOAL 1—The FLP conserves forests that protect the Nation’s waters.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Pursue projects that conserve riparian areas, forested wetlands, shorelines, riverine systems.
- ▲ Protect drinking water by selecting projects that conserve and protect public water supply areas, sole source drinking water aquifers, and aquifer recharge areas.
- ▲ Work closely with other Federal, State, and local partners to develop FLP projects that produce water-related benefits for communities.
- ▲ Connect the FLP with other State and Federal programs—including Coastal and Estuarine Lands Protection, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Wetland Reserve Program—aimed at protecting critical lands for water resources.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of acres protected by the FLP that are within designated municipal watersheds or aquifer recharge areas.
- ▲ Miles of forested shoreline and streambanks protected by the FLP.

GOAL 2—The FLP conserves forests that provide economic opportunities from forest-based products.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Continue to support professional forestry advice through a Forest Stewardship or multiple-resource management plans.
- ▲ Pursue projects that maintain productive forests through sustainable forest management that promotes rural economic development for existing and new wood-based industries.
- ▲ Work in partnership with large forest landowners (e.g., forest industry and nongovernment organizations) to take advantage of landscape-scale opportunities associated with land divestitures.
- ▲ Foster projects that support “community forests” (i.e., locally owned forests that provide economic, research, and educational opportunities to that locality through forestry operations).

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of acres protected by the FLP that are planned to be actively managed to produce timber and other forest products.

GOAL 3—The FLP conserves forests that protect the Nation’s fish, wildlife, plants, and unique forest communities.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Establish and enhance relationships with organizations to seek and develop joint projects and foster collaboration for habitat protection.
- ▲ Pursue projects that protect and conserve threatened, endangered, and rare species, and species of concern, including plants.
- ▲ Leverage fish-, wildlife- and natural-heritage-related funding sources to purchase critical lands.
- ▲ Strengthen relationships with other Federal agencies, such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop projects that meet joint goals.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of acres protected by the FLP with threatened, endangered, or other species of concern (e.g., species identified in State’s Wildlife Conservation Strategies, State heritage lists, and national and regional species conservation plans).

GOAL 4—The FLP conserves forests that enhance public recreation opportunities.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Encourage, but not require, public access on FLP projects including access to waterways and public land.
- ▲ Establish and enhance relationships with recreation organizations to seek and develop joint projects, leverage funds, and foster community support.
- ▲ Support Federal, State, and local efforts to link existing and new trail systems.
- ▲ Support economic recreation opportunities for the landowner (e.g., hunting and fishing leases, ecotourism, or similar opportunities).

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of acres protected by the FLP that are open for recreational use.



3. Slow the Conversion and Parcelization of Environmentally and Economically Important Private Forests

GOAL 1—The FLP protects important private forest lands from conversion or parcelization in Forest Legacy Areas (FLAs).

ACTIONS

- ▲ Provide national-level data to aid States in targeting high-risk areas.
- ▲ Provide financial and technical assistance to States to enhance geographic information systems.
- ▲ Continue to emphasize the use of conservation easements to protect private forest lands.
- ▲ Conserve high-value resource lands in areas experiencing high levels of conversion that have been identified as a FLA in State AONs.
- ▲ Favor FLP projects that prohibit subdivision to maintain intact working forests.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- ▲ Total number of acres protected by FLP.
- ▲ Total number of acres protected as a result of FLP projects (i.e., acreage of FLP projects and project matching properties).
- ▲ Percentage of private forest acres in FLAs that are protected from conversion by FLP and other conservation efforts (total acres conserved in FLAs).

GOAL 2—The FLP enhances opportunities for landowners to retain their working forests.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Continue to integrate FLP with other cooperative forestry and other USDA landowner assistance and economic action programs.
- ▲ Develop and provide materials on forest taxation and estate planning.
- ▲ Promote sustainable forestry practices that provide landowner income.
- ▲ Encourage and promote Federal and State cost-share programs in FLAs.

GOAL 3—The FLP increases decisionmakers' awareness of the environmental, economic, and social impacts of forest loss.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Work in partnership with public/private organizations to develop and disseminate materials to decisionmakers on land protection approaches and assessments of impacts of forest loss and conversion.
- ▲ Provide information to local/county/State jurisdictions on the impacts of forest loss and on tools that can help balance growth with the conservation of working forest lands.
- ▲ Provide local press with information about the environmental and economic benefits of each project at the time of closing.

4. Continually Improve FLP Business Practices

GOAL 1—All FLP appraisals meet Federal standards in a timely fashion.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Encourage States to provide Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (Yellow Book) training to State and contract appraisers and staff.
- ▲ Require consultation between the appraiser and review appraiser before all appraisals are started.
- ▲ Increase access to Federal review appraiser service by hiring full-time FLP review appraisers.
- ▲ Increase the number of available Federal review appraisers (e.g., Memorandum of Understandings with the National Business Center and National Forest System).
- ▲ Consult with States to find ways to expand the number of competent and qualified review appraisers and improve consistency in reviews.
- ▲ Implement Forest Service Quality Assurance Inspections of appraisals and reviews to ensure their quality.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Average time needed to complete appraisal process (time between assignment of the case through satisfactory review) [target 6 months].
- ▲ Percentage of States with Quality Assurance Inspections completed each year.

GOAL 2—All FLP conservation easements are monitored annually with written documentation.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Develop national specifications for baseline and annual monitoring reports.
- ▲ Retain project files on each FLP funded project and match projects in State lead agencies or associated State land offices.
- ▲ Monitor donated lands used for cost share at the same as FLP acquired lands.
- ▲ Sign baseline documentation at closing.
- ▲ Develop guidance for easement holders to make contact with new landowners regarding the conservation easement, baseline documentation, and restrictions as land is transferred.
- ▲ Evaluate a representative sample of closed project cases during program reviews to ensure that all cases have a baseline report and annual documented monitoring reports.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of FLP conservation easements with baseline reports at time of closing on property.
- ▲ Percentage of FLP conservation easements with annual monitoring plans.

GOAL 3—FLP projects are efficient and effective from funding to completion.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Continue to have readiness as a primary consideration in project selection.
- ▲ Return funds from failed projects for redistribution to other high-priority national projects.
- ▲ Make payments only when due diligence work is completed and terms of transaction are completed (e.g., negotiation of conservation easement, survey if needed, appraisal, appraisal review, and baseline documentation).
- ▲ Cultivate partnerships to assist in transaction due diligence work and long-term conservation easement management (e.g., memorandums of understanding for monitoring).
- ▲ Work to develop systems that link financial management and program management.
- ▲ Leverage other conservation program funds to maximize the effectiveness of the program.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- ▲ Percentage of total project cost leveraged from partners.
- ▲ Average length of time between project funding and completion [target 2 years].

GOAL 4—The FLP sustains conservation on Forest Legacy lands through implementation of Forest Stewardship plans.

ACTIONS:

- ▲ Develop Forest Stewardship plans prior to project closings.
- ▲ Encourage States to conduct a site visit with FLP project owners within the first 2 years of Forest Stewardship plan development to help landowners implement management recommendations.
- ▲ Provide integrated service delivery with other cooperative forestry programs to every FLP private non-industrial landowner to promote management and conservation of forest resources.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

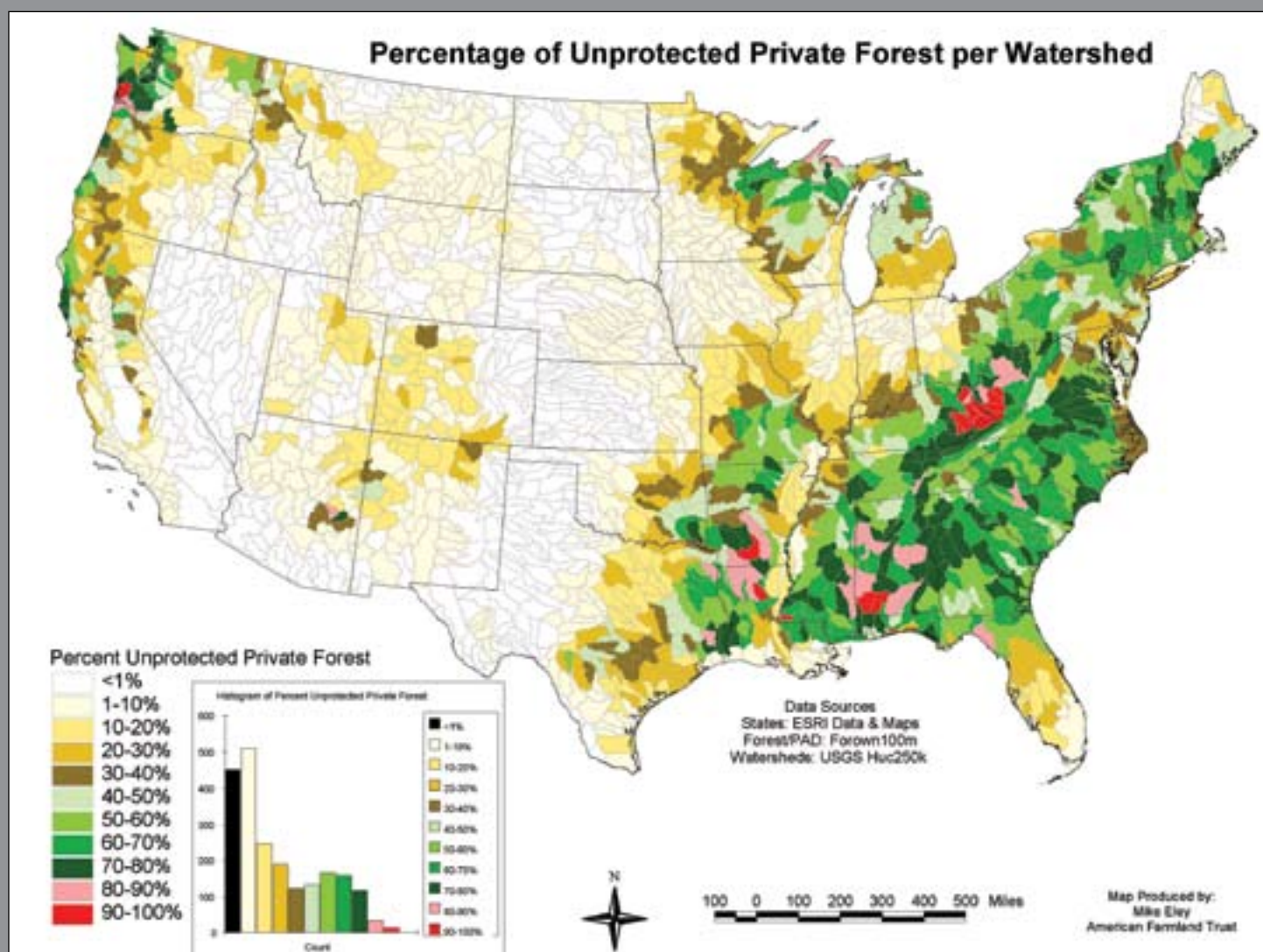
- ▲ Percentage of closed FLP projects with stewardship plans in place.

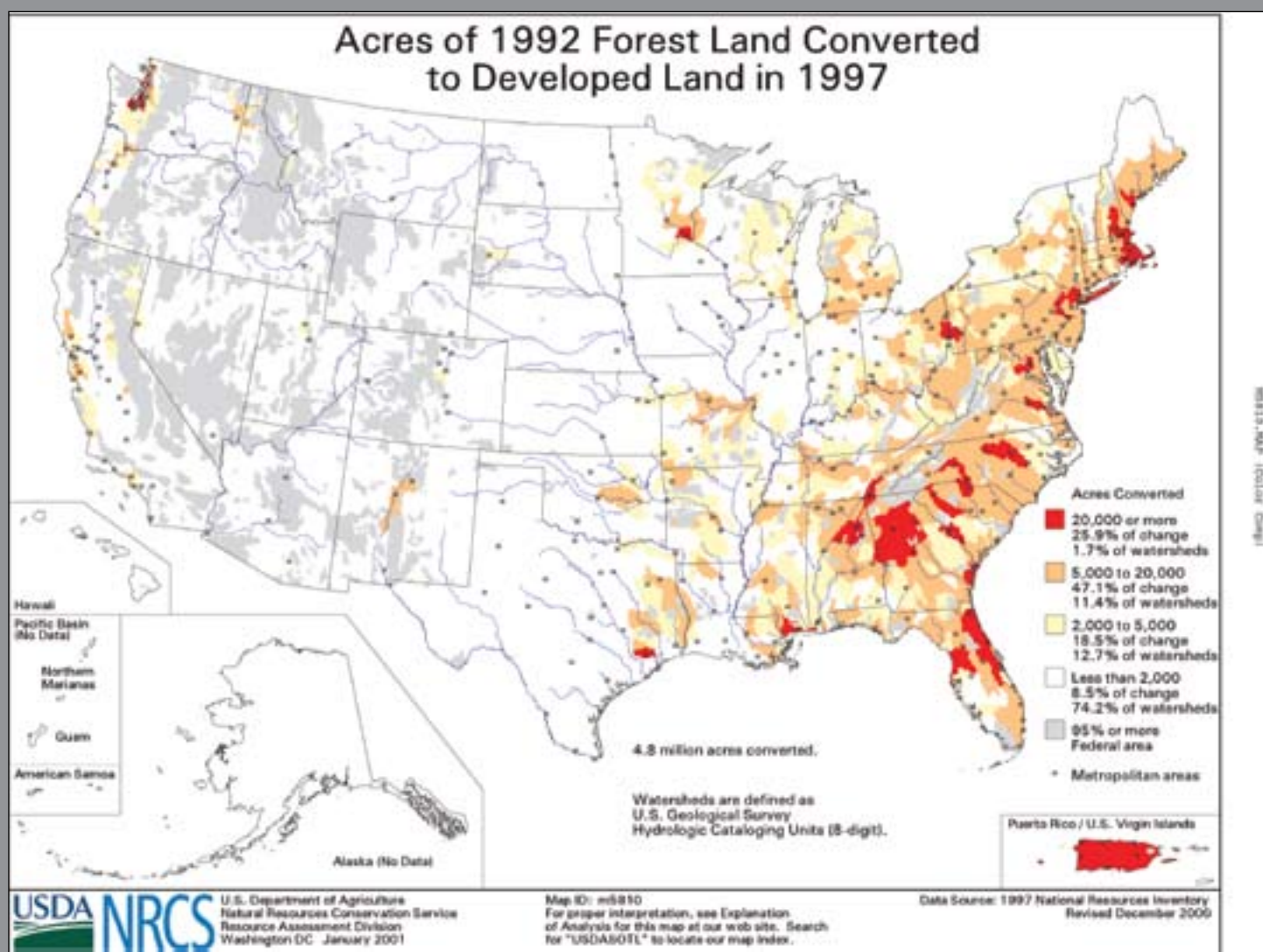
GOAL 5—The FLP communicates value and effectiveness of the program to stakeholders.

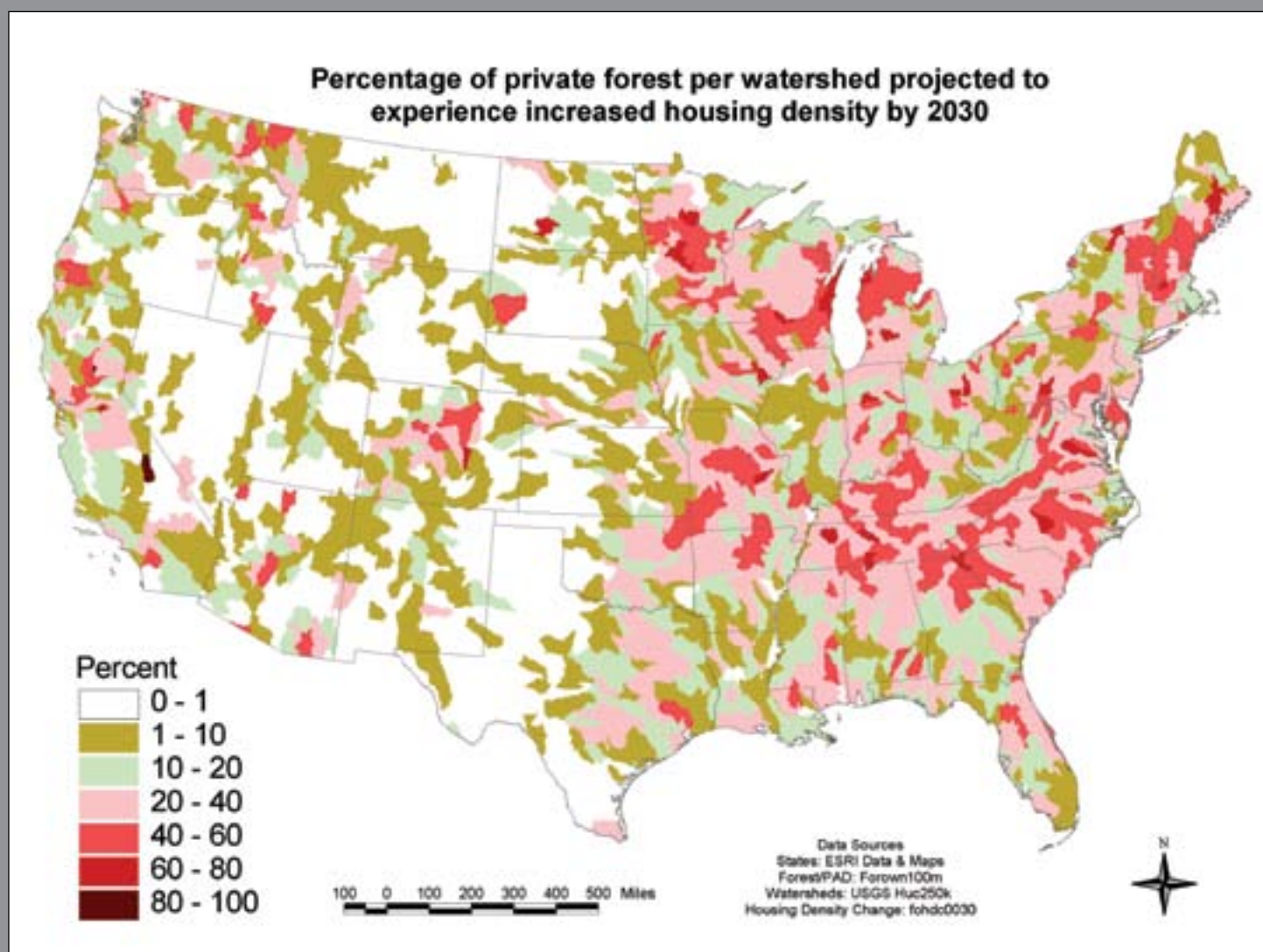
ACTIONS:

- ▲ Lead and coordinate sessions at appropriate land conservation conferences.
- ▲ Communicate how FLP leverages conservation beyond FLP projects (e.g., conservation outcomes of partnerships and initiatives that FLP projects played a key role in initiating).
- ▲ Prepare case studies that show leverage and outcome impact of FLP projects.
- ▲ Update project information in Forest Legacy Information System quarterly to ensure current and accurate status of each FLP project.
- ▲ Prepare and deliver timely, professional information to Congressional staff.
- ▲ Prepare an annual summary of program project accomplishments and benefits for the public.
- ▲ Partner with land trusts to develop communication materials.
- ▲ Recognize FLP projects with signs on properties.
- ▲ Promote and participate in events to celebrate closings.
- ▲ Develop a suite of communication pieces (newsletter, fact sheets, and Web pages).
- ▲ Coordinate with State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Councils to promote the program and market its success.











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